

The Dilution of Field Artillery Capabilities
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"God fights on the side with the best artillery."¹

"I do not have to tell you who won the war. You know, the artillery did."²

Whether used by Napoleon's forces in the eighteenth century to expand his vast empire, or to deliver devastating bombardments on Nazi troops on the Western European Front of World War II, or to destroy Saddam Hussein's tank divisions in Iraq, the field artillery has repeatedly and consistently earned its nickname, "King of Battle." However, the shift during the Global War on Terror from conventional warfare to a counterinsurgency has dramatically changed the application of field artillery and diluted the core competencies of field artillerymen. Performing non-standard missions has become the norm rather than the exception for the branch and will produce long term repercussions.³ The current combat environment, lack of fundamental training, and the exodus of junior officers have degraded the U.S. Army's field artillery ability to support maneuver warfare.

Current Combat Environment

The necessity for rapid and devastating cannon-delivered fires has become increasingly finite as the counterinsurgency operations throughout Afghanistan's Operation Enduring Freedom

¹ Napoleon Bonaparte, downloaded from, <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Artillery>, accessed on 18 February, 2008.

² George S Patton, downloaded from, <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Artillery>, accessed on 18 February, 2008.

³ Loyd Gerber, "Reset-Rebuilding FA Core Competencies for Future Full-Spectrum Operations," *FA Journal*, March-April 2007, 14.

(OEF) and Iraq's Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have required the military to act with the utmost target discrimination and proportionality. The Army's counterinsurgency manual states that limiting collateral damage and assuming greater risk to minimize harm are key elements of conducting a counterinsurgency.⁴ The war today is against a stealthy enemy who hides among the populace and uses roadside bombs rather than tank divisions and artillery to inflict the most damage. Such an enemy must be met with surgical and precision rather than a mass bombardment from an area weapon. The necessity for artillery is still evident in both theatres, but its focus, presence, and training have significantly narrowed.

Training Deficiencies

The short-term necessities to train for and conduct non-standard missions have subsequently left little to no time to train on the core competencies of the Army's field artillery. The present operational tempo of the average army unit is set at fifteen months deployed and twelve months at home.⁵ With no end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in sight, units must spend those twelve months at home training for the next inevitable

⁴United States Army Field Manual 3-24, downloaded online from, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24fd.pdf>, accessed on 17 December 2007, 139.

⁵William H. McMichael, "Mullen gets earful: More dwell needed; 12 months 'not good enough,' young captains tell Joint Chiefs chairman," *The Army Times*, 5 November 2007, pg 26.

rotation. Furthermore, the counterinsurgency requirements have forced the field artillery to fulfill a multitude of non-standard missions that fall under other functional areas such as the infantry, military police, or civil affairs.⁶

According to LTC Loyd Gerber, "Beginning in 2005, the FA School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, saw the impact of degraded core competencies in the officers returning to attend the FA Captain's Career Course (FACCC). The school's survey of the FACCC students revealed that more than 90 percent of these officers had not participated in qualification-table training."⁷ Junior officers at the battery and battalion level are integral to training plans. They cannot be expected to plan quality exercises for large numbers of people if they have not been exposed to the application themselves. This issue is amplified when a unit must deploy and is expected to effectively support the rapidly changing environment that results from maneuver warfare.

"The only portion of maneuver warfare working in a successful way that requires rules should be in the training of basic techniques. Unit immediate actions, weapons firing, land navigation, etc. all have rules that need to be perfected to the

⁶ MG David Ralston, "2006 State of the Field Artillery," *FA Journal*, November-December 2006, 2.

⁷ Loyd Gerber, *Reset-Rebuilding FA Core Competencies for Future Full-Spectrum Operations*, 15

point of second-nature..."⁸ Maneuver warfare relies on speed and initiative to exploit enemy weaknesses rather than confronting and attempting to attrite his strengths. An artillery unit that does not have sufficient training cannot provide accurate and efficient support. Moreover, the current requirement to train and perform different skill sets has not only taken its toll on artillery units as a whole, but also on the branch's junior officers.

Turnover

The Army reportedly has a shortage of 3,000 captains and majors this year, and recently began offering them bonuses of up to \$35,000 if they'd agree to remain on duty for another three years. The shortage was forecast to rise to 6,000 by 2010 as the Army tries to grow by 65,000... A total of 35 percent of the West Point Class of 2000 left the Army in 2005; 46 percent of the Class of 2001 left in 2006, and a staggering 58 percent of the Class of 2002 left active duty when their obligation expired this year. Those figures are mirrored among officers who are commissioned through university ROTC programs, with attrition rates now at a 30-year high. The Army Reserve reports that the situation is even worse for critical ranks and specialties: The Reserve has only 58 percent of the sergeants first class it needs, 53 percent of the needed captains and 74 percent of needed majors.⁹

The operational tempo of conducting a protracted war for the past six years has begun to take its effect on young officers. The mass exodus of junior artillery officers will

⁸ Eric Hiltbold, "Not by Rule: Tactical Decision Making," URL: < <http://www.oo-rah.com/Store/editorial/edi44.asp> >, accessed on 18 February, 2008.

⁹ Joe Galloway, "Asking Too Much of Too Few," *McClatchy, Truth to Power*. 24 October 2007.

create a detrimental void of combat experience and critical skills. The effects of losing skilled individuals with a plethora of combat experience and knowledge has not been lost on the Army's leadership, which offers monetary and other incentives to retain junior officers.¹⁰ Field artillery captains are eligible to receive the largest sum that is being offered, \$35,000, if they commit to three additional years of service. The loss of combat experienced junior officers will be a detriment of utility.

Counterargument

Some might suggest that the necessity for artillery will become diminished as precision munitions and technology advances. Whether it is the infantry, armor, or artillery, every branch in the U.S. Army has undergone significant changes since the advent of the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Yes, the need for massive amounts of artillery has decreased, but only for the time being. Furthermore, the artillery continues to remain relevant as the technology for precision guided artillery munitions improves.¹¹ Artillery capabilities are analogous to the B-1 modern era bomber armed with several

¹⁰ MILPER Message 07-237, 13 September 2007

¹¹ Major Mark E. Brock, "The FA is Alive and Well, In Fact, Thriving," *FA Journal*, July-August 2006.

precision-guided bombs replacing a B-27 World War II era bomber armed with two hundred "dumb" bombs. Technology did not negate the need for the bomber, but rather made it much more effective with less collateral damage. The first combat use of the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System rocket occurred in 2005. Within the past year, the 155mm GPS guided Excalibur round was delivered to firing batteries in Iraq. With such advancements, the need for the massing of fires is diminished as a single round can deliver precise and accurate results.

That is not to say that the Air Force's air superiority and precision weapons will replace the need for ground-based indirect fire weapons. Barry R. McCaffrey, Commanding General of the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) during Operation Desert Storm states that "Analysis will demonstrate that the dominant tactical weapon on the Iraqi Freedom Battlefield was artillery.... Artillery responds in seconds, lands within minutes, is impervious to weather, never runs out of fuel, provides smoke cover, illuminates targets and suppresses the fires of poorly located and identified enemy guns."¹² Artillery will have a place on the modern and future battlefields, will remain just as lethal, but with less munitions.

¹² Gen Barry McCaffrey, "Joint Firepower Wins Wars," *Armed Forces Journal*, October 2003.

Conclusion

"If we're not careful, we could end up with a generation of FA Soldiers who lack proficiency and experience in providing fire support to the ground commander. We must maintain and hone FA core competencies to preserve the reputation of our branch."¹³

The degradation of the U.S. Army's field artillery does not lie in weapon systems or technology, but in its people. The branch is not broken, but it is not at the level of effectiveness it was at immediately following the successful invasion of Iraq in 2003. Furthermore, the non-standard missions given to the field artillery are not going away anytime soon.¹⁴ It is imperative that Army leaders make parallel core competency training a necessity once again. Furthermore, the branch must take an active approach by providing mandatory remedial training whenever time permits. The branch will never reach pre-Global War on Terror levels until the present large-scale counterinsurgencies are subdued and the need for massive numbers of troops dissipates. In the interim, the field artillery will continue to perform the jobs given to it while relying on technology to ensure its place on the current battlefield. "Renown awaits the commander who first restores artillery to its prime importance on the battlefield."¹⁵

¹³ MG Daniel Ralston, 2006 State of the Field Artillery

¹⁴ MG Peter Vangjel, "2007 State of the Field Artillery, Red Pride: Anticipate-Integrate-Dominate," *FA Journal*, September-December 2007.

¹⁵ Winston Churchill, downloaded from <http://www.artilleri.com/sitater.htm>, accessed on 18 February, 2008.

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